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ABSTRACT

There has been rapid growth in the number of mature female students entering institutions of higher education. Increases in employment opportunities, decline in birth rate, and the impact of social reform and the feminist ideology all indicate a trend toward greater opportunities for women with increased female participation in higher education. As a student development specialist, the counselor must recognize the particular psychosocial needs of women and develop strategies to facilitate the personal growth and development of the female student. A broad base of research and discussions on the psychology and psychosocial needs of women has rapidly developed. Drawing on the research in this field, the counseling service at Virginia Western Community College has planned a course designed to define specific sources of psychological, sociological, and situational factors which may impede the growth and development of the mature female student. Student objectives, proposed teaching methods, and a sequence of topics for the course are detailed. Desirable group dynamics and the means for course evaluation are also described. A bibliography focusing on college women is included. (Author/AH)

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Supervised Study:

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR MATURE FEMALE STUDENTS

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There is a tide in the affairs of women,
Which, taken at the flood, leads--God
knows where:
Those navigators must be able seamen
Whose charts lay down its current to
a hair.

Byron, 1823

My concern for the growth and development
of women in our society is but a selfish
concern for my own continued growth and
development.

Anderson, 1974

A COUNSELING ACTIVITY FOR MATURE FEMALE STUDENTS

In the past several years, Virginia Western Community College has experienced a substantial increase in female student enrollment, a trend that is reflected in colleges and universities across the United States. During a three-year period between 1971 and 1973, Virginia Western Community College female student enrollment increased 41 percent while male enrollment increased by 4 percent over the same period. Entering female students accounted for 91 percent of the total increase during the period between 1971 and 1973. All increases in evening class enrollment between 1972 and 1973 were the result of women entering the college evening program; their enrollment accounted for 99 percent of the increase in evening class enrollment (Archer, 1974). National enrollment figures at other colleges and universities indicate this general trend. Elsner (1972) reports that the number of women over thirty who are students in higher education has doubled over the past decade.

Many psychological, social and economic factors contribute to the substantial increases in female college and university attendance. One significant factor has been the increase in employment opportunities for women. Hansen (1974) states that there are over 32 million women in the country's work force. Forty percent of this figure are married working women. Hansen estimates that 25-40 years of a woman's life will be spent actively working.

Most women entering colleges and universities seek education and training for employment (Women's Bureau, 1971). Increases in employment opportunities, decline in the birth rate and the impact of social reform and the feminist ideology all indicate a trend towards greater opportunities for women with increased female participation in higher education.

The increases in the number of women in colleges and universities are evident. The number of women attending Virginia Western Community College has practically doubled since 1971. These new and returning female students are entering the college environment with particular psychological, social and academic needs. These needs are of particular concern to the counselor. Effective counseling to meet the particular needs of women has received considerable attention in recent professional literature (Belson, 1973; Stahmann, 1974).

Much of the literature on women as students in higher education focuses on female psycho-social needs. Academic or intellectual achievement is typically discussed relative to the intervening effects of psychological and sociological variables. The emphasis on the psychological and sociological needs of women students places considerable responsibility on the counselor. As a student development specialist, the counselor must recognize the particular psycho-social needs of women and develop strategies to facilitate the personal growth and development of the female student.

The following discussion outlines a rationale for implementing a curricular-based counseling activity for mature female Virginia Western Community College students. The course would be labeled: Supervised Study in Personal Development for Mature Female Students. This curricular-based counseling activity is proposed as a strategy to facilitate the personal growth and development of female adult students attending the college.

This proposed course is based on several conclusions extracted from research and discussions on the psychology and psycho-social needs of women (Almguist and Angrist, 1970; Alper, 1973; Angrist, 1972; French and Lesser, 1964; Horner, 1969, 1970; Kemper, 1968; Lesser, et al., 1963; McClelland, et al., 1953; Mead, 1949; Rossi, 1967; Vetter, 1973; Westerwelt,

1973). The following conclusions provide the basis for strategies used in the proposed counseling activity as well as the content of the course:

1. The mature female student is confronted with pressures and counter pressures associated with motivations to seek self-fulfilling career versus salient socially defined gender roles.

2. Female esteem needs are traditionally acquired through the status-oriented roles of her husband, thus never establishing socially recognized status roles to satisfy personal needs for self esteem, uniqueness of personality and purpose. Typically, women who assume traditional female roles lack self-esteem, self-confidence and achievement motivation.

3. The traditional female role may become psychologically and socially constricting with increasing exposure to education, non-traditional female role models and work experiences.

4. The problem faced by many career oriented women is not deciding between a perceived career/marriage approach-approach conflict, but uncertainty about appropriate behavioral strategies to integrate roles associated with marriage and career.

5. Resistance to assume traditional female gender roles or rejection of normative female gender roles may cause anxieties (guilt and shame) as this resistance or rejection affects family members and other social relations associated with the traditional female role.

6. Anxieties resulting from guilt and shame or feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem may result from returning to or entering higher education at a time when most other adults have completed developmental tasks associated with education.

7. Women often tend to view achievement motivation as incompatible with female gender roles. Achievement motivation to seek self-esteem, purpose, status and fulfillment may be stress and anxiety producing.

8. Anxiety and stress may be associated with achievement motivation as a result of the female career oriented student's inability to separate personal achievement and accomplishments from sex experiences as a source of self-esteem.

9. Choosing and changing preferences for adult life are facilitated easiest during the student's initial experiences in the educational environment.

10. The higher the career aspirations of a woman, the greater is the expected dissonance between career role and the traditional female gender role, particularly as it relates to the family.

The above ten conclusions provide the perspective for defining female student needs and for outlining the scope and sequence of the counseling course to meet those needs. The scope of the course will be exploratory, seeking to define specific sources of psychological, sociological and situational factors which may impede the growth and development of the female student. Ideological factors are deliberately ignored; efforts will be made to translate ideological motivations and orientations into individually owned and expressed values.

Through exploration of broadly defined areas of perceived self-concept, ideal self-concept, values clarification and problem-solving, the following specific objectives will be attained:

The student will:

1. clearly perceive and be able to articulate her motives for attending the college

2. identify feelings associated with assuming the role of an entering or reentering adult female student

3. feel less anxiety resulting from assuming the role of an adult female student

4. identify various assumed gender roles and articulate the value placed on these roles

5. identify potential individual sources of status, achievement, accomplishment, self-esteem and personally defined fulfillment

6. identify potential sources of anxiety associated with motivations to seek alternative sources of status, achievement, accomplishment, self-esteem and fulfillment

7. identify factors which are constricting or limiting personal growth and development in desired directions

8. identify effective problem-solving strategies to resolve isolated and identified sources of conflict and barriers to personal development

9. explore different behavioral strategies to effect desired changes in personal development through exploration of role models.

The course will be conducted for ten weeks. One session will be held per week for two hours. The counseling activity will integrate group process, experiential learning technology, lectures and discussions where appropriate. Thirty-five percent of activities will be experiential learning, 50% group process and the remainder (15%) utilized to share information through appropriate media.

Sequence of Supervised Study:

Session 1: Team Building, Getting Acquainted and Orientation

Session 2: Trust Building, Getting Acquainted

Session 3: Self-Concept Analysis

Session 4: Self-Concept Analysis

Session 5: Values Clarification

Session 6: Values Clarification

Session 7: Barriers and Conflicts to Personal Growth and Development
Defining Barriers and Conflicts

Session 8: Problem Solving

Session 9: Problem Solving

Session 10: Role Models (Panel Discussion with Reaction)

Evaluation: Student Self-Evaluation and Course-Counselor(s) Evaluation

In view of the depth of personal exploration desired in this counseling activity, the level of task functioning and personal realtions must be very well developed. An open, high risk, sharing climate must be worked towards with deliberateness. Interpersonal interdependence within the group and problem-solving group functioning is critical for meaningful self-exploration and personal growth. Much emphasis will be placed on aspects of personal relations and task functions in group processes.

Evaluation of the Supervised Study will be conducted. Although the desired outcome of evaluation research is to isolate and define the dimensions of affect and to measure directions and the extent of change, the proposed initial evaluation will be more general in focus. The evaluation will focus on general student reactions to the course as a counseling strategy, the effectiveness of the counselor and the impact of the counseling group on self concept and values. There are four general areas of student evaluation an ex-post facto student evaluation of the counselor, the course and a subjective evaluation of personal gains; and a pretest and post-test evaluation using the Personal Orientation Inventory (Shostrom, 1966). Future evaluations of the course will seek to isolate in more detail treatment variables and related treatment affect.

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